

The Contribution of Hakim Termizi and his Scientific Activity to the Development of the Science of Interpreting the Quran

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Abstract: This article focuses on the scientific legacy of Hakim Termiziy, who lived and worked on the land of Movarounnahr, was one of the first to found the science of tafsir, and its significance today. It is shown that Hakim Termiziy created a unique school in the field of aqida, tafsir, hadith, fiqh and mysticism, based on the latest scientific findings. Then, referring to the views of Hakim Termiziy, the scientist's primacy in such areas as enlightenment, holiness and "Makasid al-Sharia" was shown, and it also turned out that he is the founder of the theory of Islamic wisdom. Hakim Termiziy's legacy in the field of Qur'an interpretation includes many important features. He is also notable for being one of the first in the history of tafsir science, a little earlier than Imam Maturidi, formulated the conditions for interpretation using a mental or ray. One of the main priorities in their research was the assertion that it is necessary to study the legacy of our scientists as a school, and not in isolated cases.

Keywords: explanation, monotheism, religion, prayer, basira, rushd, reward, piety, tawfiq, repentance, interpretation, wisdom, enlightenment, holiness.



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If we look at the history of developed societies around the world, every nation has risen primarily through its spiritual unity and national idea. As our head of state emphasized: “If the body of a society’s life is its economy, then its soul and spirit are its morality. Since we have decided to build a New Uzbekistan, we will rely on two solid pillars. The first is a strong economy based on market principles. The second is strong spirituality grounded in the rich heritage of our ancestors and national values.” Indeed, today one of the urgent issues is to study the spiritual wealth and great heritage left to us by our great scholars, to apply in life the rules of ethics expressed in their works, to develop new ways of thinking, a new worldview and working style necessary for the happiness and progress of humanity, and to shape national consciousness and ideology.

The full name of this great scholar, known by the title “Hakim,” is Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Hasan ibn Bashir al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi. He was honored with the title Hakim because he possessed profound knowledge and always spoke with wisdom. The literal meanings of the word hakim include wise, knowledgeable, intelligent, philosopher, and even physician. Fariduddin Attar, in his work Tazkirat al-Awliya, describes him as follows:

“The sage of the Sunnah, the great figure of the ummah, the shaykh of the world, one of the most distinguished of the mashayikh, one of the most revered among the saints, renowned in every heart and praised on every tongue; a sign in the realm of Qur’anic meanings, unique in matters of tradition and ethics, remarkable in the fields of truths and subtleties, adorned with noble character and high aspiration, graced with gentleness and modesty, unparalleled and perfect in the sciences, and a mujtahid in both Sharia and the Sufi path.” The author of the famous *Kashf al-Mahjub*, Hujwiri, wrote: “Hakim al-Tirmidhi is a great and blessed figure. In my estimation, he held such a high rank that my heart is completely attached to him. My teacher said, ‘Muhammad ibn Ali is a unique and incomparable pearl. There are few like him in the world.’ It is no coincidence that, due to such honorable and meaningful words, he was given the title “Hakim al-Awliya,” meaning “the sage among the saints.” Regarding his birth, one source states that he was born in the city of Termez in 820 CE and passed away in 932 at the age of 112. Another account gives the dates 859–932 CE. Muhammad ibn Ali al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi was a great Sufi and an accomplished exegete. He was not only a significant figure of our homeland but also a scholar who made a substantial contribution to the development of Sufi thought and Qur’anic exegesis throughout the entire Islamic world. He was known by the honorifics ash-Shaykh, al-‘Alim, al-‘Allama, muhaddith, az-Zahid, al-Hafiz, al-Imam, each of which reflects his immense scholarly authority, recognized by his contemporaries.

Hakim al-Tirmidhi was a great encyclopedic scholar who laid the foundation for the early development of Sufism and tafsir sciences in our region. His major contribution to the growth of tafsir in the land of Mawarannahr can be understood from the spiritual and scholarly legacy he left behind.

Authors who have written about his works mention varying numbers. Some researchers say he wrote nearly 400 books, while others claim he authored about 80. According to the Egyptian scholar Shaykh Abdulfattah Abdullah Baraka, Hakim al-Tirmidhi produced more than four hundred works, of which nearly sixty have reached us. Most importantly, the works that have survived constitute a significant part of his scholarly heritage.

Hakim al-Tirmidhi wrote highly valuable works on tafsir, hadith, fiqh, kalam, and Sufism. Among them are:

1. “Navodir al-usul fī ma‘rifat akhbār Rosul” (“Rare Methods in Knowing the Reports of the Messenger”).
2. “Al-Amṣol minal Kitāb was-Sunna” (“Examples from the Qur’an and the Sunnah”).
3. “Kitāb ul-jumal al-lāzim ma‘rifatihā” (“Sentences That Must Be Known”).
4. “Kitāb al-furūq wa man‘ ut-tarādūf” (“On Differences and the Prevention of Synonymy (Sequence)”).
5. “Kitāb ḥaqīqat ul-ādamiyya” (“Book on the Reality of Humanity”).
6. “Kitāb Urs ul-muwaḥḥidīn” (“The Ecstasy of the Monotheists”).
7. “Kitāb ul-amṣol min al-Kitāb was-Sunna” (“Book of Parables from the Qur’an and the Sunnah”).
8. “Kitāb al-manāhī” (“Book on Refutations”).
9. “Kitāb ul-Akyās wal-mughtarīn” (“Book on the Clever and the Deluded”).
10. “Al-Masā’il al-Maknūna” (“Hidden Issues”).
11. “Taḥṣīl nazā’ir al-Qur’ān” (“Study of the Lessons of the Qur’an”).
12. “Kitāb radd ‘alal Mu‘attila” (“Book of Refutation against the Mu‘attilah”).

13. “Kitāb ul-Furūq” (“Book of Differences”).
14. “Masalat ul-īmān wal-islām wal-iḥsān” (“Matters of Faith, Islam, and Excellence”).
15. “Al-farq baynal āyat wal-karāmat” (“The Difference Between Miracle and Karamah”).
16. “At-Tafsīr” (“Exegesis of the Qur’an”).
17. “Kitāb un-Naḥj” (“Book of Guidance”).
18. “Bayānul-‘ilm”. (“The Science of Clarification”).
19. “Bayānul-farqī baynas-ṣadr wal-qalb wal-fu’ād wal-lubb” [6;47] belong to this group.

Hakim Termizi’s work “Navodir al-usul fī ma’rifat akhbār Rosul” (“Rare Methods in Knowing the Reports of the Messenger”) is also known by the name “Salvat al-‘Orifin wa Buston al-Muvahhidin” (“The Pastime of the Gnostics and the Garden of the Believers in the Oneness of Allah”). This work was published in the year 1294 AH (1876 CE) in Constantinople, and in this book, which consists of 291 hadiths, al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi elaborated his doctrinal views in detail. One manuscript copy of this work is preserved in the library of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan. Another manuscript is kept under number 10842 at the Abu Rayhan Beruni Institute of Oriental Studies. Most of Hakim Termizi’s works are preserved in manuscript form in manuscript repositories in major cities of the world. The scholar’s works are held in manuscript collections in cities such as Paris, Cairo, Damascus, Alexandria, Istanbul, and London.

In his works, Hakim Termizi analyzes hadiths and Qur’anic verses, striving to reach their essence, to deeply understand not only their outward meanings but also their inner content, and to apply them to human life. In this respect, he differs from other exegetes. In interpreting the verses, he approaches them from the perspective of deep reflection and analysis.

The manuscript on tafsir by Hakim Termizi was critically analyzed by Jurabek Chutmatov, a senior researcher at the Imam Tirmidhi International Research Center. The researcher provides the following information on this matter: “Much of the information about Hakim Termizi belongs to Hujviri (d. approx. 1074). Later, based on this author, Abdurahmon Jami (1412–1494), Alisher Navoi (1441–1501), and Adnavaikh (or Adirnavaiikh) (11th/18th century) also provided information about him. Hujviri says: ‘Indeed, he had begun (a book of) tafsir. His life did not suffice to complete it. The part he managed to write before his passing had spread among the scholars.’ This indicates that people in the past benefited from this tafsir. Jami says: ‘He had begun (a book) concerning the exegesis of the Qur’an, but he passed away before completing it.’ Alisher Navoi also reports this based on Hujviri and Jami: ‘...and he had begun a tafsir, but his life did not suffice for its completion.’ However, the phrase present in Hujviri’s account—‘The part he managed to write before his passing had spread among the scholars’—is not included in the works of Jami and Navoi. It is possible that this information was omitted from the manuscript, or that they did not encounter this work, whereas Hujviri was directly familiar with it.”

Likewise, the famous scholar, exegete, and theologian Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (1148–1209), known as the son of Khatib and titled “The Pride of Religion,” made extensive use of Hakim Termizi’s method in interpreting Qur’anic verses.

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi wrote several works on the exegesis of the Holy Qur’an. Among them are “Kitab al-Tafsir al-Kabir,” “Kitab al-Tafsir al-Saghir,” and “Kitab Tafsir al-Fatiha,” which contains 1000 issues. The famous exegesis “Kitab al-Tafsir al-Kabir,” also known as “Mafatih al-Ghayb,” consists of 16 volumes. “Mafatih al-Ghayb” (“The Keys to the Unseen”) is one of the works from the later period of his intellectual activity. This work is profound in content and comprehensive in scope, distinguishing it from other tafsirs.

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, like Hakim Termizi, examined verses in tafsir from three perspectives: zahir (external), batin (internal), and composition (its structural complexity). Each of these was further divided into several sections. It is fair to say that such an approach is not found among other exegetes engaged in tafsir scholarship. Likewise, in assigning meaning to verses, he paid attention not only to their outward sense but also to their inward meanings. For example, the word “taqwa” in the lexicon signifies fear, caution, and protection, while in terminology he interprets it as follows: in Surah al-Fath, verse 26 - “faith”; in Surah al-Hujurat, verse 3 - “tawhid”; in Surah al-Shu‘ara, verse 11 - “to believe”; in Surah al-A‘raf, verse 96 - “to repent”; in Surah al-Nahl, verse 2 - “to obey”; in Surah al-Mu‘minun, verse 52 - “not to disobey”; and in Surah al-Hajj, verse 32 - “sincerity.”

In his work “Tahsil Nazair al-Qur’an,” Hakim Termizi lists 15 meanings of the word الهدي “al-huda,” but he concludes that they all derive from a single root meaning: “to incline, to lean.” He interprets the Qur’anic expression إِيَّاكَ هُدُنَا إِنَّا (al-A‘raf, 156) as “we have inclined toward You.” He further explains: “It is also called هدية ‘hadya’ because the heart inclines toward the one who gives a gift. The heart is the commander of the bodily limbs, and if Allah guides it to His light — that is, inclines it to His light - then it finds guidance, meaning it inclines. Allah the Exalted says: بِشَاءٍ مَنْ لِيُورَهُ اللَّهُ يَهْدِي (al-Nur, 35) - ‘Allah guides (that is, inclines) to His light whom He wills.’ This is the original meaning of the word,” he concludes.

After this, Termizi presents the fifteen semantic aspects (wajh) of the word الهدي “al-huda” found in lexicons - declaration, Islam, tawhid, religion, supplication, insight, knowledge, Qur’an, messenger, righteousness, reward, taqwa, divine success, repentance, and path. He explains each of these terms by linking them back to the original meaning he indicated - “to incline.” For example, he notes that in one instance the word الهدي “al-huda” appears with the meaning “supplication” (du‘a). If a servant supplicates to his Lord with an enlightened heart, then other hearts will incline toward that light. This is because the word carries light, as it emerges from an illuminated heart.

In the work “Tahsil Nazair al-Qur’an,” the main idea is that the words of the Holy Qur’an possess multiple meanings, yet there are no words that carry an entirely identical meaning. Each word has a specific meaning in its context; even if it leans toward various meanings or denotes precise concepts, in the Qur’an every expression is firmly connected to a single meaning determined by its position.

Likewise, on pages 119–120 of “Tahsil Nazair al-Qur’an,” he presents six meanings of the word “الدين,” but directs attention to the single meaning of “to obey.”

1. To submit, to lend, to believe, to reward according to deeds.
2. Saying the declaration of faith: الَّذِينَ أَلْفَقِيمُ (“He has commanded that you worship none but Him. This is the upright religion” (Surah Yusuf, verse 40).)
3. To give account: مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ (“Master of the Day of Judgment” (Surah al-Fatiha, verse 3).)
4. Decree and predestination, judgment: وَقَالُوا يَوْتِلْنَا هَذَا يَوْمَ الدِّينِ (“They will say, ‘Woe to us! This is the Day of Recompense (judgment)’” (Surah al-Saffat, verse 20).)
5. The command of a king: إِنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يَنْشَأَ اللَّهُ (“He could not have taken his brother under the king’s law unless Allah had willed it” (Surah Yusuf, verse 76).)
6. Sincerity and Islam: إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ (“Indeed, the religion with Allah is Islam” (Surah Al ‘Imran, verse 19).)

The role of hadiths in interpreting verses has been important and has led hadith scholars to become skilled in the science of tafsir. Hakim Termizi was among the first in Transoxiana to write an esoteric (ishari) tafsir. Muhammad Wasiti (d. 942) and al-Sulami (d. 412/1021) authored the

work “Haqiqat al-Tafsir.” ‘Abd al-Karim Qushayri (d. 1072) wrote “Lata’if al-Isharat”; Ahmad Muhammad Maybudi authored “Kashf al-Asrar”; Hakim Andalusi (d. 1141) wrote “Tanbih al-Afham”; Abu Muhammad Ruzbihan (1128–1209) authored “‘Arais al-Bayan fi Haqaiq al-Qur’an,” and Najm al-Din Kubra wrote “al-Ta’wilat al-Najmiyya.” It has been established that these works drew upon his writings as sources.

The result of the exegete’s ijtiḥad regarding tafsir based on personal reasoning (ra’y) is that, in the early centuries, interpreting the Holy Qur’an required the application of ra’y within the scope of high scholarly competence, deep knowledge, and philosophical contemplation. This is also referred to as combining transmission (naql) and intellect (‘aql). That is, the method based on the immense capacity and profound knowledge of the Age of Felicity (the Prophet’s era), the Companions, the Followers (Tabi’in), and their successors (Tab’ al-Tabi’in) was further developed through ra’y and intellect. In this, the exegete must possess exceptionally high capability and be well-versed in all scholarly disciplines of the first three centuries and their truths.

An important point is that in all his works, Hakim Termizi tried to more broadly illuminate his ideas and reflections by making effective use of the hadiths of our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the verses of the Holy Qur’an. In his method of commentary, it can be observed that rather than relying on transmitted sources (naql) for exegesis, he focused more strongly on ta’wil of the verses, giving greater attention to the inner (bāṭin) meanings through Sufi interpretation. For example, he explains the meaning in verse 7 of Surah al-Hujurāt as follows: **وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ حَبَّبَ إِلَيْكُمُ الْإِيمَانَ وَزَيَّنَهُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ** “He (Allah) made faith beloved to you and adorned it in your hearts.” Regarding the word *heart* in this verse, he states: “The heart is something partly internal and partly external. It is also called fu’ād. It has two eyes and an ear. The heart is turned by Allah Himself,” meaning that the faith in the heart is adorned by reason. The disbeliever, however, has not been granted this. The faith in his heart remains without love and without adornment. The disbeliever, seduced by the adornment given to him, goes so far as to associate partners with Allah and to worship other than Him. Of course, at this point the question arises: does a disbeliever possess faith? In response, the statement (that faith in his heart remains without love and adornment) contains a reference to the “Day of the Covenant” (*mīthāq*). Allah the Exalted says in verse 172 of Surah al-A’rāf: **وَأَشْهَدُهُمْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ شَهِدْنَا** “Am I not your Lord?” (He said). They said: “Yes, indeed, we bear witness.” Because when Allah the Exalted created the souls, He took a covenant from them (i.e., affirming that He alone is their Lord).

Thus, Hakim Termizi emphasizes that in interpreting the meaning of the Holy Qur’an, explaining hadiths, and adhering to jurisprudential matters, he followed the Sufi path, and he explains that the Sufi way is the only path that brings peace to a person’s conscience-the heart. In this way, Hakim Termizi, who created such teachings, gained fame throughout the Muslim world as one of the great religious scholars of the 9th–10th centuries, one who interpreted the teachings of Islam more deeply on a scholarly basis, and one of the unique figures of the Sharia.

Hakim Termizi’s manuscript on tafsir was analyzed by Jurabek Chutmatov and published for the first time in Arabic under the title “Kitāb Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Musammā Baḥr al-Tafsīr.” An additional section titled “Wa tāliḥihi muqtatafāt min tafāsīr al-Hakīm al-Tirmidhī li-ba’z al-āyāt” was also included. This work was published in 2023 by the “Dār al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyya” publishing house in Istanbul.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Hakim Termizi created his own school of tafsir regarding the exegesis of the Holy Qur’an. In it, we witness that he analyzed the verses using both reason (‘aql) and transmitted reports (naql).

According to the definition of later scholars, the science of tafsir discusses the following matters:

1. The manner of reciting the words of the Qur'an. That is, in how many ways the words of the Qur'an are read. For this reason, in their tafsirs, some exegetes not only explained each verse, but also presented the transmitted modes of recitation. In explaining the qirā'āt within the science of tafsir, assistance is drawn from the science of qirā'āt.
2. The meanings of the Qur'anic words. The aim here is that the lexical meanings of Qur'anic words are also explained within tafsir. Therefore, references by lexicographers are frequently cited in tafsir works. Hence, in the science of tafsir, there is a necessity to be fully knowledgeable in the science of lexicology.
3. The singular rulings of Qur'anic words. The aim here is to explain in which morphological form (wazn) and grammatical pattern (bāb) the verses appear, what the characteristics of these forms and patterns are. In explaining these, the science of morphology (ṣarf) becomes necessary.
4. The compositional rulings of Qur'anic words. That is, when discussing a particular word and what meaning it conveys when combined with other words. What is its syntactic structure according to grammar (naḥw), why the diacritical marks appear as written in the verse, and what meaning the composed word indicates. To understand these, it becomes necessary to know the sciences of semantics (ma'ānī) and grammar (naḥw).
5. The meanings indicated by Qur'anic words in composition. That is, what meanings the words indicate when they form a composition. What meanings the verses convey together with the verses preceding and following them. It also explains the figurative (majāzī) and literal (ḥaqīqī) meanings of words. To understand these, aid is taken from the sciences of uṣūl al-fiqh, rhetoric (bayān), and hadith.
6. The supplements of the science of tafsir, i.e., abrogating and abrogated verses (nāsikh and mansūkh), reasons for revelation (asbāb al-nuzūl), allusions in the Qur'an, stories, and other matters. In understanding these, assistance is drawn from the Qur'an, the hadith, and the science of sīrah.

Hakim Termizi's tafsir work has many distinctive aspects. For example, in terms of style, it later played a major role in shaping the foundations of the Mavarounnahr (Transoxiana) school of tafsir. According to the ideas he put forward, the best deeds are to interpret the verses of the Holy Qur'an and the noble hadiths with justice; and those who approach jurisprudential issues from a highly appropriate and logical point of view are-according to him-only the Sufis. At the same time, the scholar states that in such situations, one can serve Islam selflessly only by approaching matters without emotion, impartially and sincerely.

To conclude, in every era, certain exegetes wrote their tafsirs using a style that could be easily understood by the general public. In composing tafsir, they gave priority to writing in a clear and simple manner. In their view, explaining and presenting the Qur'anic verses in a simple style to people, and making the primary goal easily comprehensible and accessible, was essential. This, as a solution, led to such interpretations. This situation can be clearly observed in nearly every exegete of each era. However, in addition to the points mentioned above, Hakim Termizi's tafsir aimed to convey both the outward and inward secrets and mysteries of the verses to the people. As an encyclopedic scholar, Hakim Termizi worked productively in the sciences of tafsir, fiqh, hadith, theology, language, and Sufism. Because he often did not cite narrations related to the explanation of the verses, and instead focused on a Sufi interpretation of the Qur'an, he can be considered the scholar who initiated a unique Sufi approach to Qur'anic interpretation in Mavarounnahr.

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